

## 2004 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



### COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS COMISIÓN DE ASUNTOS HISPANOS

#### EDUCATION

***Encourage bilingual college students to become teachers in Washington.*** School districts face significant difficulties in hiring and retaining sufficient bilingual teachers. Bilingual teachers are crucial in improving the academic success of English Language Learners. The CHA recommends the development of a conditional scholarship or loan repayment program. The CHA supports legislation that will give bilingual college and university students the incentive to become teachers while at the same time securing their commitment to work in Washington. (HB 2708)

***Address barriers faced by English Language Learners in attaining the Certificate of Mastery.*** Only 9% of 10<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Learner (ELL) students meet the WASL standard in mathematics, compared to 37% of all students. Only 13% of ELL students meet the WASL standard in reading, compared to 60% of all students. School districts must work to address these disparities in WASL results and help to reduce the barriers faced by ELL students. Potential solutions may include extra individual help and instruction for ELL students who are identified as not meeting WASL standards, alternative assessments to the WASL for diligent ELL students, and options for retaking the examination. (HB 2195 / HB 2761)

***Support the DREAM Act.*** Hundreds of thousands of children are brought to the United States by parents seeking employment opportunities in this country. These children have no recourse to adjust their immigration status. For those successful immigrant students who graduate high school and seek to go to college and to pursue a career, the federal DREAM Act provides an avenue for accomplishing this as well as adjusting their immigration status. The Commission recommends efforts by Washington State legislators to support this important federal legislation.

***Bring college and university admission processes closer in line with recent US Supreme Court decisions.*** Since 1997, admissions of Latino students at our state's higher education institutions have not kept up with our population growth. While the Hispanic population comprises almost 8% of the population in Washington, Hispanic enrollment in the University of Washington's graduate and professional programs is less than 3%. Colleges and universities are becoming less and less diverse. At the same time, the highest court in the land has declared that an individualized consideration of race and ethnicity in university admissions is acceptable. Our state should follow the guidance of the Supreme Court, and pass legislation that recognizes the importance of diversity in our institutions of higher education. (SB 6268 / HB 2700)

## IMMIGRATION-RELATED

***Don't link immigration status to drivers' licenses - promote safety on our roads.*** A drivers' license serves two purposes: to be a reliable source of identification and to show that a driver has met the qualifications to be able to safely drive in the state. Qualifications for a drivers' license should not be linked to immigration status. A legal presence requirement for drivers' licenses will compromise the basic purposes of a license: identification will become more difficult, more drivers on the roads will go untested and uninsured, and our roads will become less safe. (HB 3025)

***Discourage the local enforcement of immigration laws.*** Enforcing federal immigration law is the responsibility of the INS, not of state and local agencies. A positive relationship between our state police and the immigrant community benefits our community as a whole. However, such a positive relationship cannot exist when people are afraid to contact police because of fear that the police will inquire into their immigration status. State agencies should make clear to clients that they are not immigration agents, and will not inquire into immigration status unless required by federal law.

## HEALTHCARE

***Maintain affordable and accessible healthcare coverage for all Washington State residents.*** Through changes in funding healthcare programs in Washington State over the past three years, the biggest impact has been in communities of color and low income families. Changes in Medicaid funding and the Basic Health program have made it more difficult for Latino children and adults to access healthcare coverage. These changes have resulted in an increase on non-insured rates among Latinos in our state. Almost one in three Latinos goes uninsured, compared to one in ten non-Latino Whites. The state should develop alternative funding programs for providing healthcare coverage for non-insured low income residents, so that they may access much needed healthcare services.

## FARMWORKER PROTECTION

***Allow Labor and Industries to enforce penalties for violations of the minimum wage.*** Many of Washington's farmworkers work at or just above the state minimum wage. L&I currently has no effective method of enforcing penalties for those employers who fail to pay workers even the minimum wage. The ability to impose civil penalties will give L&I the necessary power to protect our state's minimum wage workers. (SB 5503 / HB 1548)

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

***Promote the development of Hispanic small businesses, and reduce barriers to accessing state contracts.*** Efforts to promote small business development and reduce tax burdens on small businesses will help Hispanic entrepreneurs start businesses and expand their existing businesses. At the same time, many Hispanic businesses face unique challenges when attempting to contract with the state of Washington. Contracting by minority firms with the state is at its lowest point in 20 years. We advise the legislature to reduce the barriers faced by Hispanic business owners in securing contracts with Washington State. (HB 2691 / HB 2784 / HB 2906)